

# The Wall

by Gloria Jay Evans

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I don't know when I first began to build the wall. I suppose it was when it occurred to me that I could keep people out of my life by building a simple wall. The wall would be a kind of boundary, a kind of protection. At first the little wall was only knee high. It was really quite attractive, made of native stone I had found in my life.

The wall was so small that some people didn't notice it --- and fell flat on their faces.

Others saw it, but would step over it and come very close to me. I found this very uncomfortable. So I built the wall higher.

This was really much better. But soon I found that people would come and rest their arms on the wall while talking to me. Some stayed too long and some were not my kind of people. And even when I edged the top of the wall with sharp stones, they didn't seem to notice.

One day one of them vaulted over the wall and stood right inside. This made me angry. I decided to build the wall higher.

As I continued to build, I became more and more self-sufficient. I painted designs on the stones. I made arcs and colored windows that distorted the light so that one could neither see in nor out.

The wall pleased me so that I longed to show it to someone --- or explain how I had achieved each design. But I realized that no one had stopped by to talk for some time. Some walked by not seeming to notice me or my wall. Others stood sadly by and watched me build. I thought they were jealous of my wall and I resented them, all of them.

One day a man stopped to listen as I explained how I was building the wall. He wanted to come inside to see what I was doing. I explained to him that the whole purpose of the wall was to keep people on the other side. But I could tell he didn't understand or care. As he left I went back to build the wall higher.

I became so absorbed in my wall that I found little time for anything else. I searched my life for new and different stones. I found stones that I didn't even know I had.

The design was very important to me. I would build and rebuild until it was just the way I wanted it. Some stones were so dear to me that I polished them carefully several times a day. Then one day I realized the wall was so high that I no longer saw anyone go by. I no longer heard anyone. Everything was quiet.

"Is anyone there?" I yelled.

There was no answer. It was dark inside the wall and the air was foul. I sat there for a long time. It was quiet and dark and lonely. Only the whispers of my memories could be heard.

I thought of those who did not like my wall, who had laughed at it, scorned it, been jealous of it. I sat in the shadows and listened for someone to come and tell me that they really liked it. But it was dark and quiet. Very quiet.

I don't know how long I sat in the shadow of my memories, but one day I noticed that one of the stones didn't match as well as I had thought and the wall was crooked. This was too much. I had thought my wall was perfect. But it was not. Frantically I examined the wall and, sure enough, there were other imperfections.

To add to the pain of my discovery, one day someone yelled from the other side. "Your wall is ugly. It is twisted and gray and misshapen!" It was the day the flower fell at my feet that I began to cry. I ran to the wall and climbed to see who had thrown it over. By the time I reached the top, no one was there. I returned to the flower and sat for a long time looking at its perfection. I began to see the folly of my wall and its imperfection.

Floods of tears brought me to my knees. "Oh, I am so alone, my wall is too high. My wall is imperfect and ugly. Everything is in vain. I have nothing left. Won't someone help me --- Please?"

Then a strange thing happened. Something inside me stirred as a baby quickens in its mother's womb. And in the stillness of my broken world I knew in my whole being a blessed presence. I knelt there in wonder that God would come to me. And I wept with joy that I was not alone --- and that my darkness had been penetrated by his blessed light.

For days I stood in the joy of his presence. My wall shone with the warmth of his light and I no longer felt cold and alone. I knew that he had watched me build my wall and that He had waited patiently for me to see it was in vain.

Finally it occurred to me that He would know why my wall was so ugly. When I asked Him, He began to teach me. Day by day He showed me my error. He gave the stones names. "This stone is jealousy. You must remove it." Sometimes I would be reluctant. For days I would protest. This was my favorite stone. It was one I had saved and cherished for years. When I was finally ready, He helped me remove the stone.

One day when we had removed one of the heavier stones, a hand came through the opening. "Take it," He said.

Hesitantly I took the hand. For a long time I stood in the warmth of that grasp. Somehow I knew the hand and the one behind it had been waiting for an opening in my wall. There stirred in me a hunger and a longing for human comfort. At first I thought His presence within my wall was enough. But with the coming of the hand clasp, I knew He had come to tear the wall down. A part of me wanted to spring forth but another part of me cried out in fear. Why couldn't I keep a part of the wall? His presence was enough. I looked at all the stones I had collected throughout my life. Some were still in the wall. The others He had stacked neatly in a corner. If I ever chose to rebuild the wall, I could. I begged Him to throw them away but he told me that in them, I could test my strength. How they tempted me!

One day when He didn't seem to be around, I dashed over and picked up a cherished stone to rebuild my wall. It was then I realized that if I were to be strong enough to live without the

wall, I would have to know the stones were there. I would have to know the name of each one. In knowing their names, I could not use them again without betraying Him.

As we removed more stones, the light came in. And His light would shine out. I began to look through the open places. I could see things I hadn't noticed for a long time --- dewdrops, ladybugs, sunbeams, and blades of grass. He told me many things and gave me gifts. The more I talked to Him the more I wanted to talk to Him. I saw things I had never seen before and heard things I had never heard before.

One day as I was standing by an open place, a man stopped to talk. I told him about the blessed presence and how He had changed my life. The man said he understood. "But," he said, "if that's true, why do you have this block of resentment in your wall? I can't see Him. The stone blocks the way."

I looked and sure enough, one of my most prized rocks lay directly in front of me covering nearly one side of the wall. It had been one of the first stones I had placed. It was a large conglomerate of disillusionment, childishness, stubbornness and other petty stones. I asked the man if he would help me remove it. I was so ashamed the blessed presence might see this large rock. The man did loosen the stone and I thanked him as he went on his way. I wondered how I could ever remove that stone without help.

I really tried. I tugged and tugged and struggled and struggled but it only moved slightly. I sat down in despair. I knew the man was right. The stone must be removed.

"Oh dear," I said. "How can I ever remove this one! It is so big and I am so weak."

"You cannot move it," He said.

"But I must," I replied. "The man said he could hardly believe you were here with that stone in the wall."

"If you really want the stone removed, I will remove it." We went carefully over to the wall and chipped away each small stone until the large one was diminished.

Even with the stone of resentment gone, people kept stumbling over debris and remnants of the wall as they walked through my life. There was a woman who knew Him and had let Him tear down her wall. She walked in and sat down on one of the stones. I told her what He had done for me and she told me what He had done for her. I told her how I had suffered so and that I would never forget how forsaken and lonely I had felt inside my wall.

"Yes," she said, "self-pity is a terrible thing."

When she left I found the stone of self-pity in my wall. It was wet with my tears. I dried it off and laid it with the other stones. The wall was almost demolished. I looked around at all the world I could see. I thought of His great love for me and breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction and pride that I should have come so far.

"Look how much I have accomplished," I thought. "How much better I know Him than some of those others out there. Poor unenlightened ones who don't know Him nearly as well as I. It is so easy. Why can't they see?"

Overwhelmed by all He had done for me and all He had taught me, I stood upon one of the remaining stones and began to tell anyone who passed by what the blessed presence had done for me. I was appalled that no one seemed to hear or understand what I was saying. I told them how dark and lonely it had been inside the wall. And how He had come to help me tear it down. How vain it was to build walls. I noticed others working on walls and ran over to plead with them to stop, but no one would listen. In my frustration I cried out, "Why can't they hear? Why can't they understand? Why can't they believe me?"

I lay face down on the stone I had stood upon. It was extremely large, highly polished. It had been my great prize. It was more than life size.

"Do you want the answer to your question?" He asked.

"You know I do," I sighed.

"Raise your head and look at the stone you are lying upon."

I raised my head and gasped for I saw my own reflection in the massive stone. There was pride in my look and manner. I knew the stone was pride. Quietly, we removed it.

Now we could see beyond the meadow and a path led forth from where I stood. Then He said a strange thing. "Now you must go. I will go with you and yet I will stay here."

"But I don't want to leave," I protested. "The wall still stands. There are other stones to remove. I want to be here with you."

"I said I would go with you. There is an opening in the wall for you to come and go. Do you remember the flower that fell at your feet, the hand that you clasped, the woman who showed you self-pity or the man who showed you resentment?"

"Oh yes," I sighed, "Oh yes."

"Then you must go and do likewise. For to whom much is given, much is expected. Wherever you go I go with you. And whenever you come back here to be tempted or to remove more stones I will be here."

So I went forth. Soon I saw a wall builder. He had just started to build his wall. I saw pain and hurt in his face --- and confusion in his frenzy to build. I leaned against the wall wanting to tell him I understood. But the stones were placed so that the sharp edges cut me and I retreated in pain. I stood by the wall nursing my wounds. In sadness I watched him build. Soon his wall was so high I could not see him and my heart ached because I knew it was dark and lonely inside. I called to him but he could not hear. The ugliness of the wall was unbelievable. I reached out and touched it, leaned against it. I don't know how long I was there but one day I heard someone yell, "Your wall is ugly. It is twisted and gray and misshapen."

Strangely, though I had never heard a sound from the wall before. Great racking sobs exploded from inside. Tears streamed down my face and I cried out in frustration, "Won't You help him please? Please?"

I thought my heart would break. In desperation I looked about. If only I could give him a gift to ease his pain. I looked down to find a small flower at my feet. Hastily I plucked it and threw it over the wall. Then the sobbing stopped and I knew a great peace, for in some strange way I knew that the blessed presence had come to him and that my aching heart and the gift of the flower had helped bring it about. I knew that soon there would be an opening in the wall, and I could grasp his hand. I knew, too, that he might never know that it was I who was there. But it really didn't matter for in some wonderful way, I had become a part of every man's life. Through the blessed presence we would all become one. Somehow I knew I would never be the same.

I returned to my wall and the blessed presence was there. Together we removed the stones of fear, mistrust, and indifference. He said, "Now you begin to understand love. Without love, all the things I have told you would be meaningless. You will begin to live in peace and understanding. You will learn gentleness and kindness. But it will take time. I will always be with you."

So it was that I went forth reaching out --- sometimes just waiting beside a wall, sometimes tossing a flower, sometimes grasping a hand.

There are days that I return to my wall. I touch the stacked stones and examine the remnants of my wall. At times I am filled with a desire to rebuild it, but we talk and He helps me to be strong. Sometimes we remove another stone.

It is strange that I began to recognize others like myself. When I see someone with a flower, I know that it will be thrown over a wall.

Sometimes I see someone standing by a wall sadly watching a wall builder. I see those who are sitting on stones explaining what kind of stones they have used.

I know the blessed presence is with them, too. We pass on the path and a great love passes between us. I see peace in their eyes and faith in their hearts and I know that someday the walls will be down and we will all walk free from place to place --- The Great Family Of God.

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